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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
22 August 1962

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Copy No. 13

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Recent Soviet Military Aid to Cuba

1. Intelligence on recent Soviet military assistance to Cuba indicates that an unusually large number of Soviet ships have delivered military cargoes to Cuba since late July and that some form of military construction is underway at several locations in Cuba by Soviet bloc personnel who arrived on some of these ships and are utilizing material delivered by the vessels. During the period at least 1,500 passengers have debarked from four ships under security conditions suggesting that their mission is related to the construction and military activity; another 1,500 arrived during the period and were greeted with considerable publicity as economic specialists and students. Some still unconfirmed reports suggest that recently arrived Soviet bloc personnel number as many as 5,000. The speed and magnitude of this influx of bloc personnel and equipment into a non-bloc country is unprecedented in Soviet military aid activities; clearly something new and different is taking place. As yet limited evidence suggests that present activities may include the augmentation of Cuba's air defense system, possibly including the establishment of surface-to-air missile sites or the setting up of facilities for electronic and communications intelligence.

2. As many as 20 Soviet vessels may have already arrived in Cuba since late July with military cargoes. Five more Soviet vessels have left Black Sea ports under conditions suggesting that they are en route to Cuba with additional military equipment. Most reports on these shipments have referred to large quantities of transportation, electronic, and construction equipment, such as communications and radar vans, trucks of many

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varieties, mobile generator units, tracked and wheeled prime movers, cranes, trailers, and fuel tanks. Eyewitnesses who saw the material being transported from the port areas report that much of the transportation was done at night and even that town street lights were turned off as the convoys passed through.

3. Personnel who arrived on the four Soviet passenger vessels--each of which has a normal passenger capacity of 340, though one of them declared 365 passenger when leaving the Black Sea--have been described variously by Cubans who have seen them. Most agree that they were obviously non-Cuban in appearance and were dressed in civilian clothing. A number of independent sources report that the foreign personnel were dressed in dirty, dusty, slept-in, red-checkered shirts and faded blue trousers. The foreign personnel unloaded the vessels themselves; usually Cuban militiamen have been charged with this work even when it was a military cargo. There is no hard evidence that any of these people are in combat military units. There is strong evidence that their mission is related to unidentified military construction.

4. At least a dozen refugees from the area of Matanzas have reported independently on military construction at two sites near that north coast city. Two and possibly more ships arrived in the port of Matanzas and unloaded cargoes under tight security precautions. Cargoes were taken to at least two general areas where construction is underway. Initial construction, according to one of the eyewitnesses, involved the grading and leveling of a naturally level portion of the western slope of a hill by Soviet personnel using heavy equipment. This was taking place at a site just east of Matanzas at a place called El Bongo. Other sources confirmed that material was leaving the docks in the direction of El Bongo. Another source, who left Cuba more recently, reported that by 4 August foreign personnel were assembling what appeared to be a prefabricated curved-roofed structure at El Bongo. The other site of construction activity near Matanzas is apparently just across the provincial border in Havana province at Santa Cruz del Norte, near the former Hershey sugar mill. In this place, too, construction activity initially involved the leveling of a portion of a hill near the coast. Cuban residents had been cleared from the area.

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5. There are as yet no confirmed report of construction activity underway in other parts of Cuba. However, there is considerable reason to presume that such activity is underway or is to be initiated shortly in a number of other locations in Cuba, ranging from Oriente province in the east to Pinar del Rio in the west. ~~A refugee~~ from the port of Antilla in Oriente province reported that a Soviet ship unloaded in late July at nearby Nicaro. The material unloaded, including electronic vans, tracked prime movers, and trailers, was moved through Antilla toward the Peninsula de Ramon, an area where he reported construction work had been underway for some time. Another ship is reported to have discharged a similar cargo as well as foreign personnel in the port of Casilda, in southern Las Villas province. In northern Las Villas, Cayo Esquivel, an island off the coast, has reportedly been evacuated. In the area just south of Havana city, we have numerous independent reports that a number of farms have been evacuated and that the boys' reformatory at nearby Torrens has been converted for living quarters for numbers of foreign personnel. Information from individuals who live near the reformatory indicate that the numerous Soviet personnel who moved in early this month wore "casual, dirty, civilian clothes." Other reports indicate that quantities of equipment such as has been reported elsewhere have been seen on the confiscated farms near the reformatory. Other reports from other parts of the island indicate that Cuban families have been evacuated from an island near Mariel, the port in Pinar del Rio province where much of the equipment was unloaded, and from a farming area near Guatana, Pinar del Rio province.

6. What the construction activity involves is not yet known. The activity in the Matanzas area could be the initial phases of construction of a SAM-equipped air defense system, erection of electronic and communications intelligence facilities aimed at Canaveral and other US installations, or an ECM system aimed at US space, missile, and/or other operational electronic systems. The kinds of equipment described could fit with any of these objectives; the evidence thus far, as well as Soviet practice in other countries receiving bloc military assistance, would suggest, at least tentatively, construction of an air defense system based on the GUIDELINE missile. Information to confirm or refute this should become available within a week.

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7. The step-up in military shipments and the construction activity once again provide strong evidence of the magnitude of the USSR's support for the Castro regime. Together with the extraordinary Soviet bloc economic commitments made to Cuba in recent months, these developments amount to the most extensive campaign to bolster a non-bloc country ever undertaken by the USSR.

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